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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000736

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STATE FOR AF/W AND NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/07/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MO](#) [MR](#)  
SUBJECT: MOROCCO CONCERNED BUT CAUTIOUS IN RESPONSE TO COUP  
IN MAURITANIA

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 00412 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On August 7, A/PolCouns met with Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Chief of Staff Nassar Bourita to express the United States' strong condemnation of the August 6 coup in Mauritania and to request that the Government of Morocco (GOM) issue a statement condemning it. Bourita replied that while the GOM was concerned about events in Mauritania, and was closely monitoring the situation, it was unwilling to issue a statement condemning the coup at this time. Bourita said that while the GOM opposes the military takeover of any democratically elected government, the GOM's first priority concerning Mauritania was stability. As a country targeted by extremists, especially al Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb, Mauritania represents for Morocco a key counterterrorism partner. The GOM wants to minimize the ability of Islamic extremists to exploit the current political fragility in Mauritania, explained Bourita. Although it had not anticipated the timing of the action, the GOM had known that political tensions in Mauritania had been running high for at least the last six months, and that such an outcome was anticipated. Bourita said that the GOM was using indirect channels--what we took to mean Moroccan intelligence--to communicate with the military junta.

¶2. (C) An August 7 front-page editorial entitled "Preserving Mauritanian Stability," in Le Matin -- a pro-Palace daily in Morocco known to be an unofficial voice of the GOM -- was highly critical of President Sidi Mohamed Abdallahi and his wife, accusing the detained President of emollence, indecision, nepotism, blindness, and plutocracy. A factual, companion article emphasized the junta's establishment of a "State Council" (Ref B) and the cancellation of Abdallahi's recent decision to dismiss several top military generals. The article noted that the coup supported parliamentarians and had been followed by pro-coup demonstrations.

¶3. (C) The Counselor to the Secretary General of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), Saida Mendili, told us on August 6 that the AMU knew nothing more than was on the news and had no comment as yet. Libyan Leader Mohammad Qaddafi, who currently holds the AMU presidency, has asked AMU Secretary General Habib Benyahia to go to Mauritania to assess and report on the situation. The body will make no formal statement until after his trip. Our visit yesterday to the French Embassy's acting 1st Secretary for External Affairs David Portal also yielded no additional insights into the coup but he agreed to keep us apprised of significant changes not reported in the press.

¶4. (C) Comment: The GOM has long been concerned about

terrorism and instability in Mauritania. More recently, it has worried about Abdallahi's outreach to pro-Taya and Islamist elements. The GOM did not publicly condemn the coup in Mauritania in 2005, and we anticipate that it will take a similarly cautious approach to the current events. Having seen many coups in West Africa, the Moroccans instinctive reflex is pragmatic: diplomatically, but not publicly, condemning the coup, opening communications with the junta to encourage stabilization of the situation, and, eventually, quietly encouraging the coup plotters to restore democracy at some point in the future.

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